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# Dialogue of Civilizations in a Multipolar World: Towards a Multicivilisational-Multiplex Word Order

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In this article, I explore the relationship between the new multipolar trends related to the emerging powers and the idea of dialogue of civilizations. My starting point is to understand multipolarity as part of a broader epoch making process of transformation of contemporary international society beyond its Western-centric matrix. In the first part of this article, I therefore argue for an analytical understanding that emphasizes the emergence of a new multipolar world of civilizational politics and multiple modernities. In the second part of the article, I reflect on how to counter the risk inherent in the potential antagonistic logic of multipolarity by critically engaging the normative Huntingtonian construction of a multicivilizational-multipolar world order. I argue that the link between dialogue of civilizations and regionalism could represent a critical issue for the future of global peace. In particular, multiculturally constituted processes of regional integration are antidotes to the possible negative politicization of cultural differences on a global scale and can contribute to the emergence of a new cross-cultural *jus gentium*. These elements are critical to the construction of a realistic dialogue of civilizations in international relations while preventing the risks inherent in its growing multipolar configuration. They shape what, drawing on Amitav Acharya's work, could be named a multicivilizational-multiplex world order.

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## Global IR and the Challenge of Dialogue of Civilizations: The Puzzle

The 2015 ISA annual convention thematized, with an unprecedented strength and scale for an academic conference, the theoretical and political implications of the end of the Western-centric matrix of international relations. Recognizing that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to navigate this post-American multiplex world, Amitav Acharya, in his ISA presidential address, outlined—under the heading of Global IR—an agenda for research that compels us to better understand the diversity that exists in our world, as well as to seek new common ground based on pluralistic universalism (Acharya 2014a). In this search, Global IR faces the formidable methodological challenge of endorsing an analytical eclecticism that transgresses “parsimonious and self-contained paradigms and research cultures” (Acharya 2016:10). In this spirit and, while acknowledging that there is no blueprint for the construction of a peaceful and just world order, I want to explore how, in the contemporary geopolitical context of new rising powers, the idea of dialogue of civilizations can contribute for such a new common ground to emerge.

The idea of dialogue of civilizations emerged in the 1990s as a global political vision (Petito 2007a) against the backdrop of two competing and powerful discourses, the “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996) and the “globalization of liberalism/end of history” (Fukuyama 1992). As I have argued elsewhere, this vision represents a powerful normative challenge to the contemporary political orthodoxy implicit in the above political discourses because it calls for the re-opening and re-discussion of the core Western-centric and liberal

assumptions upon which the normative structure of contemporary international society is based (Petito 2009). In other words, the key philosophical assumption behind the idea of dialogue of civilizations represents a challenge to the Western-centric matrix of contemporary practices and thinking in international relations and reflects what Amitai Etzioni has convincingly highlighted:

both the end-of-history and the clash-of-civilizations arguments approach the non-Western parts of the world as if they have little, if anything, to offer to the conception of a good society—at least to its political and economic design—or to the evolving new global architecture (2004:26).

More importantly to the economy of this paper, the idea of dialogue of civilizations in international relations, from a geopolitical perspective, represents a radical critique of the political and ideological dominance of a US-led liberal world. At the core of this vision one finds a clear normative resistance against the idea of a unipolar world order, often accompanied by the conviction that we are gradually, but ineluctably moving towards a multipolar world. The question then arises as to whether the idea of dialogue of civilizations should endorse the notion of a multipolar world order. This is a relevant question, since polarity is clearly associated with a realist (and neo-realist) approach to international politics and with a conceptualization of the international arena as a system of forces to be brought into equilibrium (the stability of the system) by the well-known mechanism of the balance of power (Mearsheimer 2001; Morgenthau 1948; Waltz 1979). The emphasis here is overwhelmingly on material sources and great powers, the rest—the normative and non-state dimensions which are at the heart of the vision of dialogue—being fundamentally irrelevant.

In this paper I explore the hypothesis that the empirical trend of the worldwide decentralization of power away from what Huntington (1999) defined as the “lonely superpower” towards other major, established and emerging, regional centers of power (the EU, Japan, China, India, Russia, Brazil, South Africa and others) may well be more conducive to the emergence of a more pluralistic and just world order. By dialectically juxtaposing the analytical descriptions of a multipolar world with the metaphor of a multiplex world (Acharya 2014b), I want to offer some thoughts on how the link between the growing multipolar configuration of the international system and regionalism as political process could represent a critical issue for the future of global peace, especially in the context of the emerging new civilizational politics.

My main target here is not Huntington’s thesis of the clash of civilizations as analytical framework but, rather, the Huntingtonian construction of a multicivilizational-multipolar system as the normative solution that he proposes to prevent the danger of the clash. My concern is that a multicivilizational-multipolar world order—and, in particular, an unproblematic emphasis on (or even an enthusiasm for) multipolarity in the current international context of civilizational politics—leaves us with a worrying system of forces, of civilizational macro-regional great/rising powers, ready for collision; paradoxically, a scenario not too dissimilar from the clash of civilizations. This is of a great topicality in an international context, where multipolarity often seems to have become one of the key pillars of the alternative vision of world order put forward by new rising powers like China and Russia, as well as by a number of critical scholars such as Chantal Mouffe and Danilo Zolo, who have recently focused on the idea of a balance of regional spaces and argued in favor of a multipolar world order to oppose the American imperial project.

I argue here that, without a process of dialogue of civilizations at different levels, as an overarching framework of reference, there is a risk that this multipolar vision would end up looking very much like the model of multicivilizational-multipolar order put forward by

Huntington as the antidote to what he saw as the greatest threat to world peace—the clashes of civilizations. This is an important point, as this part of Huntington’s argument—absent in his original 1993 *Foreign Affairs*’ article—has largely gone unnoticed (the reason also being that it is sketched in the last few pages of a book of more than 300 pages—an unbalance which arguably confirms the impression that the book is really about the clash rather than about how to avoid it). To counter this risk inherent in the potential antagonistic logic of multipolarity, I put forward an argument for multiculturally constituted processes of regional integration as antidotes to the possible negative politicization of cultural differences on a global scale. Drawing on Amitav Acharya’s work, and in order to distinguish it from the Huntingtonian version, I call this perspective a multicivilisational-multiplex word order. But before critically discussing the Huntingtonian risks of a multicivilizational-multipolar world order, some preliminary remarks on the very notion of multipolarity in the current context of civilizational politics are in place.

### **The Alignment between Multipolarity, Civilizational Politics and Multiple Modernities: Beyond the Western-centric Matrix of the International Society**

#### *Multipolarity and the Demise of the Liberal International Order*

A widespread debate has been ranging throughout the post-Cold War period on whether the end of the bipolar international system would lead to uni- or multipolarity (Krauthammer 2002/2003; Layne 1993; Wohlforth 1999). While there have been different positions on the nature of the post-89 international system in terms of the distribution of power, it is fair to say that the view that we are living in a “unipolar era” is today less popular than it was in the early 1990s and predictions that the twenty-first century will see the emergence of a post-American world are increasingly common (Mahbubani 2008; Mead 2014; Zakaria 2008). This view is arguably the result of certain critical security and political developments of the last fifteen years, including the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, it is also based on less contingent medium-/long-term economic estimations which suggest the fast progression of the (relative) economic decline of the US in favor of the new Asian fast-growing economies of China and India—a reality that has become more visible after the 2008 financial crisis with the recent global economic recession, whose origins were in the American heartland of the West (OECD 2014; UNDP 2013). Unsurprisingly, in a public non-academic way, the term multipolarity is increasingly used to point to the growing number and roles of major emerging regional centres of powers (China, India, Russia, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, etc...), which have now also begun to be recognized in institutions of global governance like the G-20 and the BRICS.

Only recently, academic discussion has moved to the issue of whether the end of unipolarity will also represent a challenge to the international liberal world order designed and supported by the US after WWII. John Ikenberry (2011) has been forcefully arguing that the new emerging powers are not going to challenge the rules of this international liberal order, in which they have become highly integrated and thanks to which they have gained their renewed great power status. Today’s “illiberal” powers, the integrationists’ argument continues, are not revisionist powers of the liberal rules and institutions of world order, for they do not have an alternative visions of order and tend mostly to behave as free riders (Ikenberry 2014; Lieber 2014). Opposing this argument, Martin Jacques (2012) has argued that, as China becomes the new (economic) hegemon of the twenty-first-century international system, it will seek to shape a Chinese-led world order with Chinese political and cultural

characteristics, with a result that is likely to be similar to the hegemonic impact that the US had in the last century on world order.

Exploring an intermediary position which remains sensitive to non-Western theoretical and political perspectives, Peter Katzenstein (2012a: xiv) has argued that, since “international liberalism is not sufficiently capacious to encompass the full normative reach of the emerging world order”, we need to focus on the multiple processes of Sinicization or Indianization which are contributing to the redefinition of the current world order. Amitav Acharya (2014b:78), similarly, has argued that the new rising powers will also significantly affect the future world order in terms of norm-making and on the basis of their respective cultural traditions and approaches to sovereignty, security and development.

Following their lead, I want to suggest that, while on-going changes in the material structure of the international system have now become, in some way, part of the mainstream discussion of the transformation of contemporary international relations, what has not been given the attention it deserves is how the changing distribution of capabilities in the international system is also taking place as part of the broader epoch-making process of transformation of contemporary international society beyond its modern and Western-centric matrix. In other words, the much more recognized structural-material changes of the economic and power shift towards the East and BRICS—now also institutionalized in the form of intra-BRICS cooperation (Stuenkel 2015)—have to be understood within the context of the transformation of the ideational/ideological structure of international society. This transformation is occurring simultaneously and is, firstly, visible in the global resurgence of cultural and religious pluralism in the quest for authenticity of the non-Western worlds (Petito and Hatzopoulos 2003; Thomas 2005). These forces have been shaping local, national, regional and global politics through what, I want to argue, can be described, in a qualified way, as a new form of civilizational politics.

#### *A New Civilizational Politics: Civilizations as Strategic Frames of Reference of Post-89 International Politics*

My argument is that a specific structural-ideational change of the international system has further intensified with the end of the Cold War: the reassertion, as Jóhann Árnason (2003) has posited (and, in this regard, Huntington’s argument retains part of its validity), of civilisations, defined in a fundamentally *culturalist-religious* sense, as *strategic frames of reference*, not as direct protagonists, of international politics.<sup>1</sup> This ideational development is, in a sense, a typical post-Cold War fact. As he has pointed out, in fact, “civilizational claims and references now play a more important role in the global ideological context than they did when the rival universalisms of the Cold War era dominated the scene” (Árnason 2003:6). It is also, however, the result of what could be termed as the cultural turn of the post-colonial world—that is, part of a longer-term process of challenge to Western dominance, intensified from WWII, and which Hedley Bull (1984) calls the “revolt against the West”. Following the struggle against the political imperialism of the West (decolonization) and its economic imperialism (the Third-World call for a New International Economic Order), the post-colonial world, disenchanted by the economic and democratic failures of the European ideologies like nationalism and socialism, incarnated by elites very often trained in European capitals, turned to a fight against the cultural neo-imperialism of the West in search for cultural authenticity. The political slogans were now calling for the indigenization of modernity, the most politically visible examples of which were the 1979 Islamic Revolution

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<sup>1</sup> This understanding of civilization has perhaps its most well-known articulation in Max Weber’s analysis of the religious preconditions for the West in *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1968).

in Iran and the worldwide emergence of political Islam. Other examples were the new cultural assertiveness of Asian countries in the name of so-called “Asian values” and Hindu nationalism; more recently, the growing role of Orthodoxy in the Russian state seems to suggest that the world is still living through this process of cultural revolt against the West.

This latter process arguably intensified when the end of the Cold War implied the political inevitability of a common (political, economic and social) liberal and Western model for the entire planet. Often, in this context, the great worldwide religious traditions have become the major voices of radical critique of the globalization of a Western-centric and liberal order. In the powerful words of Régis Debray, the once-Marxist revolutionary and friend of Che Guevara, “Religion turns out after all not to be the opium of the people, but the vitamin of the weak” (2008:35). It becomes one of the key vectors of political resistance and struggle in the name of the social ethics and arguments which resonate in the everyday life of what Jean Bethke Elshtain (1999) has provocatively labelled “really existing community”. This is why the post-colonial cultural turn is, in my view, also a post-secular one or, as Ashis Nandy has noted, implies the return of the sacred (Nandy 2007; Petito and Mavelli 2014). This historical process, it seems to me, contributes to the new centrality of civilizational politics in the post-Cold War era. In this regard, Samuel Huntington’s argument retains part of its validity—in the words of Peter Katzenstein (2012a:xv) “He alerted us to the fact that, with the end of the Cold War, the cultural context of international relations had undergone a fundamental change”.

This new civilizational politics is, in other words, the predominant ideological context in which the emerging multipolarity is taking shape. Civilizational politics is neither new nor unchanging. However, contemporary civilizational politics seems to have very clear culturalist/religious connotations which were less relevant, for example, during the Cold War, where civilizational politics was defined in a fundamentally political way: on the one hand, the West committed to liberalism, individualism and free market capitalism and, on the other, the East committed to socialism, collectivism and state-planned economy. It is enough to think of the political transformation that the civilizational notion of the West has gone through from the post-WWII community of the Free World—which included, for example, Japan and Turkey—to the more culturalist-religious notion of a Judeo-Christian West which, in the post-89 context, makes it much more difficult to refer to Japan and Turkey as part of the West, even if the old strategic and security considerations might still prevail.

Of course, other conceptualizations of civilizations are possible and, therefore, different kinds of civilizational politics can be imagined. For example, we can think of civilizations as material cultures (*civilizations matérielles*), as Fernand Braudel (1982) did with the Mediterranean region, turning on its head the historical image of this sea as a civilizational-religious fault line—which is still at the base of Huntington’s thesis. As a result, civilizations, defined as material cultures, could become strategic frames of reference for a different civilizational politics of regional integration, as was attempted—modestly and not without contradictions—in post-89 Mediterranean-centered regional political initiatives such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership or the more recent Union for the Mediterranean (Adler, Crawford, Bicchi, and Del Sarto 2006; Petito and Brighi 2010).

### *Civilizational Analysis and Multiple Modernities in IR*

To argue that civilizations have become relevant strategic frames of reference for international politics is to introduce a dimension of political construction which is incompatible with an understanding of civilizations *à la* Huntington as primarily enclosed, static and monolithic actors with dispositional characteristics (1996); it does not imply, however, that civilizations are imagined communities or invented traditions which need to be

understood as boundary-demarkating discursive practices (Jackson 2007). These two diametrically opposed understandings of civilizations in International Relations—dispositional and discursive (Jackson 2010)—paradoxically converge on the assumption that civilization-based thinking is necessarily a conflict-generating factor and therefore equates the question of civilizational politics from the beginning with the inescapable antagonistic logic of the clash (see also Bilgin 2012), an argument which I have tried to challenge elsewhere (Petito 2011).

Drawing on pioneering research by Katzenstein, who has put the new sociological scholarship known as civilizational analysis (Eisenstadt 2000) in dialogue with IR in his trilogy devoted to the issue of civilizations in world politics (Katzenstein 2010, 2012a, 2012b; see also Bettiza 2014 for the first comprehensive review of this IR literature), I maintain that civilizations can be understood as “loosely coupled, internally differentiated, elite-centred social systems that are integrated into a global context” (Katzenstein 2010:5). Furthermore, new multi-disciplinary research (Hobson 2004 & 2010; Ling 2002; see also Nelson 1973 for a pioneer argument in this vein) shows that civilizational complexes, constellations, configurations or patterns—as some of these theorists rightly prefer to describe the phenomenon to indicate its complexity and dynamisms—are arguably constituted in a much more prominent way than previously thought by inter-civilizational encounters and mutually constitutive transcivilizational relations. This sociological understanding of civilizations, as Katzenstein has shown, is compatible with a political analysis of civilizations as social construction of primordality, rather than dispositional or discursive because, as I have tried to indicate, “it is not the category but the act of reification or construction that is politically consequential and that required political analysis” (Katzenstein 2010:12).

This pluralist (and dialogical!) theoretical perspective is important for the argument developed in this article because it opens up the possibility of understanding another critical dimension of the epoch-making process of transformation of contemporary international society beyond the Western-centric matrix: the emergence of multiple modernities out of the failure of the Eurocentric theory and practice of modernization (Árnason 2003; Eisenstadt 2003), arguably one of the strongest rationale for advancing a Global IR research agenda.

Whether it is the issue of democracy, development, human rights or secularism, just to mention a few important instances of institutional arrangements to have emerged out of what Eisenstadt has called the single and encompassing civilization of modernity (2001), it is becoming increasingly theoretically clear and politically visible that the merging of “modern” political values and practices with traditional local cultural references and ways of living will be the rule rather than the exception in a post-Western world. Discussing Eisenstadt’s theory of multiple modernities, Katzenstein has effectively pointed out that “Modern societies are therefore not converging on a common path involving capitalist industrialism, political democracy, modern welfare regimes, and pluralizing secularism. Instead, the different religious traditions act as cultural sources for the enactment of different programmes of modernity” (2010:17). Hence, it is no surprise that the instances of “modern” institutional arrangements which I mentioned above—democracy, development, human rights or secularism—are increasingly hyphenated or discussed in conjunction with Islam, Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and other traditions.

To sum up, I have argued that today’s international society is experiencing an epoch-making process of transformation beyond its liberal and Western-centric matrix. Three interlocked developments—multipolarity, civilizational politics and multiple modernities—are critical to this transformation. In other words, we are seeing what I would call an *alignment* between the emergence of a new multipolar world, civilizations as strategic frames of reference for international politics and programs of multiple modernities. This alignment—a new

multipolar world in a context of civilizational politics and multiple modernities—requires much more analytical study.

Unquestionably the Huntingtonian analysis did capture some important trends of the current epoch-making transformation of contemporary international society. The emerging architecture of the international system, however, could be more like—to use Acharya’s (2014b) effective metaphor—a multiplex world: multiplex in its worldviews, in its array of relevant states, its inter-governmental and non-state actors and its complex dimensions of interdependence at local, national, regional and supra-national levels. As he has rightly pointed out—and this should work as a double note of caution when using the concept of multipolarity—first, “The emerging powers by themselves neither represent nor exhaust the possibility of an alternative, or post-hegemonic, global governance structure” (2014b:3) and, second, “The tendency to conceptualise the emerging world order in terms of European history [read: multipolar concert] is wrong-headed” (2014a:653). In terms of the bigger picture (and bracketing many of the complexities that any discussion on world order is doomed to fail), for Acharya a multiplex world order might be a hybrid between a concert and a regional world order model (2014b:113). For such a model to emerge and contribute to a more peaceful and just future, however, I argue that the combination of dialogue of civilizations and regionalism are essential. In order to show that, I now turn to the under examined Huntingtonian normative vision of a multicivilizational-multipolar world order and reflect on how and under which conditions this new emerging post-Western international system could be more conducive to a pluralistic and just world order or what I call a multicivilizational-multiplex world order.

### **A Critique of the Huntingtonian Multicivilizational-Multipolar Model of World Order: Building Bridges not Walls**

The popularity of Huntington’s thesis no doubt has to do with framing post-89 international politics as a multicultural fact. In his 1996 book, Huntington argues that the only way to avoid the clash of civilizations is to envisage a multicivilizational-multipolar order organized around what he calls “the core states of civilizations [which would be the] sources of order within civilizations and, through negotiations with other core states, between civilizations” (1996:156). He then adds that “a world in which core states play a leading or dominating role is a sphere-of-influence world” and that “a core state can perform its ordering function because member states perceive it as cultural kin” (1996:156). On the one hand, his proposal of multicivilizational-multipolar order is, indeed, an acknowledgment of the centrality of the growing multicultural nature of international society. On the other, the problem with such a model of order is that it is constructed only on the grounds of a material structure of power, which might well represent the material/geopolitical structure of the global order but does not make for the normative/ideational structure of such an order. It is true that Huntington sketches very briefly (in less than a page) three rules for a possible normative structure of his multicivilizational-multipolar order: the *abstention* rule (core states should abstain from intervention in conflicts in other civilizations), the *joint mediation* rule (core states should negotiate to contain or halt fault-line wars among states or groups from their civilizations) and, finally, the *commonalities* rule (peoples in all civilizations should search for and attempt to expand the values, institutions and practices they have in common with peoples of other civilizations) (1996:316, 320). These rules, however, reveal even more neatly the realist assumptions of the model as they, in essence, amount to nothing but a minimalist ethics of non-interference—the commonalities rule pointing, perhaps, to some “thin” minimal communal denominator of universal morality but, in fact, being a perfect exemplification of



that rhetorical technique which consists in vaguely referring to some kind of undefined normative necessity of an opposite aspiration to the clash. The result of the Huntingtonian construction is, therefore, a worrying system of forces, of civilizational macro-regional great powers ready for collision—the clash of civilizations—and the only possible hope is to make the stability of the system attainable through the mechanisms of the balance of power. However, the realist emphasis, shared by Huntington, on the centrality of fear, insecurity and threats in an anarchic environment, seems simply to make the clash of civilizations unavoidable—as merely a matter of time.

Paradoxically, at first sight, such a framework seems strikingly similar to the arguments advanced by two European critical scholars—Chantal Mouffe (2007) and Danilo Zolo (2007)—in the context of their critique of the American unipolar project, the idea being the construction of a multipolar planetary balance of power around macro-regions defined along civilizational lines. Mouffe has argued that the central problem which the current unipolar world, under the unchallenged hegemony of the United States, is facing is the impossibility for antagonisms to find legitimate forms of expression. Under such conditions, antagonisms, when they do emerge, tend to take extreme forms. In order to create channels for the legitimate expression of dissent, we need to envisage, Mouffe suggests, a pluralistic multipolar world order constructed around a certain number of regional blocs and genuine cultural poles. Along similar lines, Zolo argues that, to confront the United States’ dangerous imperial tendencies, “the project of a peaceful world needs a neo-regionalist revival of the idea of *Großraum* [greater space]” (2007:160). These arguments for a multipolar, multicivilisational world order, however, require a degree of caution for, as Zolo has correctly sensed, “before this kind of order can be achieved complex economic, technological, cultural and religious conditions must be met that make a dialogue between the world’s major civilizations possible” (2007:162).

Zolo correctly cautions about the apparent self-evident force of this multipolar model and points to the necessity of immersing it in a broader and real process of dialogue between the world’s major civilizations. In the present international situation of growing cultural and religious misunderstanding and mistrust, which prompted Edward Saïd (2001), in the aftermath of 9/11, to speak of the real danger of a clash of ignorance, the conditions should be created for widespread processes of “inter-civilizational mutual understanding” at multiple levels. In this respect, the link between civilizational dialogue, mutual understanding and peace is fortunately becoming more widely acknowledged. I want to argue here that the ideal of “building bridges of mutual understanding” in order to learn (or re-learn) how to live together within different cultural communities—what Andrea Riccardi has called, in his (2006) book, the art of “*con-vivere*”—is, in fact, also critical in a more specific sense: it provides the key antidote to the potential antagonistic logic of multipolarity. To explain this point, I want to return for a moment to the Huntingtonian model of multicivilizational-multipolar order discussed above.

As I have argued, the Huntingtonian vision of a multicivilizational-multipolar order moves from the recognition of the growing multicultural nature of international society but, and herein lies the problem, his proposal is based on the opposite logic of the dialogical politics of multiculturalism that needs to be strengthened. In Huntington’s view, the multicultural nature of the world has, on the one hand, to be almost confined, internationally, within a civilizational cage, following the “good-fences-make-good-neighbours” principle and, on the other, has to be contrasted, domestically, through strict immigration policy and a new integrationist approach. Therefore, in his follow-up book to the *Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington has unsurprisingly argued against the growing presence of Latinos in the United States because of its supposedly weakening effect on American Anglo-Protestant culture and national identity (2004). In sum, his argument is not about building inter-civilizational

bridges of mutual understanding but, rather, about building walls of containment and separation, something that in the long term would inevitably reinforce the antagonistic logics of multipolarity along civilizational/great powers lines.

### **The Global Multiculturalism of Dialogue of Civilizations: From New Regionalisms to a New Cross-Cultural *Jus Gentium***

The idea of dialogue of civilizations envisages “bridges” not “walls”. In particular, new forms of regionalism could represent critical vectors in building cross-cultural bridges and giving shape to a world order inspired by the global multiculturalism of dialogue of civilizations. The emphasis here is not on the geographical-territorial dimension of civilizations but, rather, on the normative one—that is, on civilizations as the great cultural and religious social traditions of the world. This implies, for example, that the neoregionalist revival that Zolo and Mouffe favour as a way of constructing a multipolar spatial ordering does not need to take shape along civilizational-culturalist lines. Rather it cannot be dismembered from reinforcing a dialogical politics of multiculturalism “at home and abroad”.<sup>2</sup> A case in point of contemporary relevance to European regional integration and the relationship between Europe and the Muslim world could be the framing of Turkey’s EU accession strategy as a “bridge” between Asia and Europe or as a new “alliance of civilizations” (Ardıç 2014; Bilgin and Bilgiç 2011). My argument is, in fact, that multiculturally constituted processes of regional integration are more conducive to a peaceful global order, as they act as a preventive antidote to the possible negative politicization of civilizational differences on a global scale.

A similar point can be made to support the creation *ex novo* of multicultural forms of regional cooperation and integration which are, in any case, arguably justifiable on functionalist grounds in response to the common challenges brought about by the processes of globalization. Initiatives of regionalization involving, for example, member-states from a plurality of existing regional political organizations can further contribute to the dilution of the risks of a multipolarization along enclosed civilizational lines. This is coherent with new trends in regionalism, such as open- and inter-regionalism, and could represent the basis for a truly decentralized and multilateral structure of global governance. In this context, however, the system of global governance, to borrow an effective image from Zolo, should operate a transition “from the logic of the Leviathan to that of the thousand fragile chains of Lilliput” (1997:154).

For example, from such a perspective, the already-mentioned initiatives of Mediterranean regionalization involving European and Arab countries are to be encouraged as a way of fostering bridges of communication and mutual understanding between the European Union and the Arab League; they can also constitute laboratories for the praxis of intercivilizational dialogue. Finally, this form of multiculturalism “abroad” is likely to facilitate “living together” at home and *vice versa*, a fact that cannot be overlooked in our era of global communication. Even in the extremely difficult and tragic contemporary context, I would continue to anticipate in the long term a reciprocally beneficial relationship between the integration of the growing Muslim presence in Europe—arguably one of the greatest challenges facing the future identity of Europe—and a peaceful relationship between Europe and the Muslim world in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

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<sup>2</sup> “At home and abroad” stands for “domestically and internationally” and is an expression taken from the title of Michael Walzer’s (1994) book.

As Acharya (2014b) has rightly argued, “The proliferation of regional institutions, their expanding functions covering both traditional and transnational issues, and the growing incidence of inter-regionalism, may introduce a healthy diversity and leadership into the emerging world order” (2014b:113). This new forms of regionalism, while giving institutional shape to an important layer of post-national global governance, avoid the reproduction of enclosed regional blocks—either along civilizational or trading block/regional hegemonic lines—because of their open and globally interconnected nature.

This consideration, however, needs to be qualified when the normative–legal dimension of these processes of regionalism is brought into focus. The question is that a new regionalization of the world along these lines might also contribute to a more pluralistic way of conceiving international law informed by non-Western legal conceptions—one more manifestation of multiple modernities. This is the vision on which Danilo Zolo has founded the research program with the very indicative name of *Jura Gentium*, which assumes a pluralist approach to international law opposing both the traditional ethnocentrism of Western legal science and globalism/cosmopolitan normativism (*Jura Gentium* 2002).

The point here is that the pluralization of regional legal systems and the emergence of regionally based understanding of international law could arguably reinforce the antagonistic logics of mutipolarity. Interestingly, in the aftermath of the last waves of decolonization, Hedley Bull was already arguing that the emergence of a “multicultural international society” imperatively requires a *new normative structure*, since “we have... to recognise that the nascent cosmopolitan culture of today, like the international society which it helps to sustain, is weighted in favour of the dominant cultures of the West” (1977:305). The political discourse of dialogue of civilizations, by calling for the reopening and re-defining of the core Western-centric and liberal assumptions upon which the normative structure of contemporary international society is based, provides a conceptual and political framework within which to answer to this momentous challenge.

In other words, the growing multicultural nature of contemporary international society—emerging as part of a growing worldwide demand for cultural recognition—needs what can be referred to as a form of “global multiculturalism”.<sup>3</sup> However, the form of multiculturalism that we need on a global scale should not be based on a postmodern form of subjectivism or a form of radical cultural relativism but needs to be accompanied by a commitment to an active politics of dialogue of civilizations: primarily a dialogue among the great cultural and religious social traditions of the world. More specifically, what is needed is a politics based on a “presumption of worth” and shaped by a Gadamerian dialogical model as fusion of horizons, as has been persuasively argued with the reference to the domestic debate on multiculturalism by Charles Taylor (1994) and Bhikhu Parekh (2000) (see also Dallmayr 2002 and Petito 2011).

My argument is that global multiculturalism and dialogue of civilizations are conceptually interlinked and must be conceived in a mutually constitutive relationship. Just as Parekh has argued, from the perspective of his domestic theory of multiculturalism, that “the good [multiculturally constituted] society does not commit itself to a particular political doctrine...[but] its constant concern is to keep the dialogue going and nurture a climate in which it can proceed effectively, stretch boundaries of the prevailing forms of thought, and generate a body of collective acceptable principles, institutions and politicise” (2000:340), I, too, would contend that a commitment to an active politics of dialogue of civilizations—that is, a willingness practically to give life to this intercivilizational dialogical encounter—is necessary for the emergence of this new normative structure in the form of what could be

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<sup>3</sup> Here I am using the distinction used by Bhikhu Parekh (2000) between “multicultural”, which refers to the fact of cultural diversity, and the term “multiculturalism”, which refers to a normative response to that fact.

called a new cross-cultural *jus gentium* (Dallmayr 2004). Here, the interplay of the Latin legal terminology captures in a synthetic manner the challenge—the need to move from the old Westphalian *jus gentium*, to a new, post-Westphalian, cross-cultural *jus gentium* by integrating, in some sort of unity in diversity, the plurality of the emerging *jura gentium*. To this political enterprise, the intellectual work of political and IR theorists engaged in comparative political theory and non-Western forms of theorising is likely to be of great future political relevance (see, for example, Dallmayr 2010; Godrej 2011; Ling 2014). The Global IR research agenda provides an important opening for these developments.

### **The Multicivilizational-Multiplex World Order of Dialogue of Civilizations in International Relations**

Today, dialogue of civilizations is at the very heart of such creative efforts to imagine an alternative conceptualization of a world order beyond its Western-centric matrix. To give shape to a peaceful and just order out of the emerging *alignment* between multipolarity, civilizational politics and multiple modernities is no doubt an epoch-making challenge, for which there is no blueprint. My argument is that an alternative model of world order inspired by this dialogue of civilizations can, indeed, have multipolarity as its spatial/geopolitical orientation but on the condition that a global politics of dialogical multiculturalism flourishes as a way of mitigating the risk of a “culturalist enclosure” in this former model and to dialogically inscribe plurality at its normative center. Concretely, this neo-regionalist, multipolar and cross-cultural model of world order would be different from the Huntingtonian model of multicivilizational-multipolar order as: (i) it is not shaped along civilizational-culturalist lines but by a dialogical multiculturalism, (ii) it is based on new forms of cross-cultural regionalism and the negotiation of a new cross-cultural *jus gentium* and (iii) it is committed to a widespread process of “intercivilizational mutual understanding” at multiple levels.

This international architecture closely resembles the multiplex world order envisaged by Acharya as a hybrid between a concert and a regional world order model (2014b:113). This is why I have used the multicivilizational-multiplex label to describe it. It remains to be seen, however, where the future of world order and global governance will tend to predominantly gravitate along the continuum between a concert *sphere-of-influence* world of great powers and a post- and trans-national *regional* world of global governance. Unsurprisingly the current international predicament has been paving the way for a new scholarly interest on the notion of spheres of influence beyond what Susanna Hast has aptly called, in a recent excellent book on the topic, its Cold War pejorative connotation that is preventing us to see that its normative core may still be very much relevant for the future of world order (2014). Given the growing activism of emerging powers, especially at a regional level, I indeed concur with Etzioni that viewing international order through the prism of spheres of influence can provides unique insights into the twenty century challenges and world order configurations (2015:117).

Here again, it seems to me, that the Global IR orientation is promising. By rediscovering the forgotten histories of comparative international systems and word orders as a source of theorising (Acharya 2014a:652), we might find out, for example, that, first, the relationship between spheres of influence and regional cooperation does not need to be understood as the given-for-granted Westphalian and Eurocentric knowledge on international relations would have it; and second, that a different, “non-Western” rooted conceptualization, can better capture some of the epoch-making transformations of contemporary international society. This process of de-Westernization of the IR canon is already in itself a form of cross-cultural

dialogue and, as Ashis Nandy has interestingly argued with reference to the idea of dialogue of civilizations, such an opening also call for a re-engagement with the disowned or repressed traditions that make up the European experience for “any alternative form of dialogue between cultures cannot but attempt to rediscover the subjugated West and make it an ally” (1998:146).

Such an outline of an alternative model of world order and global governance is, of course, still very general. Many other contextual conditions and considerations would need to be brought into the discussion to provide a more developed model responding to twenty century international predicament. Here is not the place to deepen such a discussion. However, perhaps as a way of concluding, I would like to point to the need, today, for new heterodox alliances to support such an international political theory of world order: the promotion of common initiatives (cultural, social, communicative and political) to build new transversal practices of solidarity, cooperation and mobilization, involving groups from different cultural backgrounds, civilizational locations and religious affiliations acting together on the basis of common political aspirations and beyond the limited anti-hegemonic logic of the rising powers. This practice of cross-cultural dialogue carries the hope that we may learn how to live together in our increasingly multicultural and globalized international society. The political articulation of the idea of a dialogue of civilizations that I have sketched here is offered in the hope that it might contribute to this more peaceful and just future world order to come.

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